

HIST 323: Atlantic Africa

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Spring 2022
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Mural at Brazil House, Accra, Ghana, 2012.

Course Description

This is an inter-disciplinary course on the diverse histories and cultures of Africa and its trans-Atlantic diasporas from 1791 to the present. The course will be organized around specific themes rather than on chronology. We will highlight the resilience and struggles of enslaved Africans and their descendants in (re)creating some of the main cultural staples of the Americas. While emphasizing the tragedy of the slave trade and racial capitalism and terror, we will also examine how Black returnees to Africa initiated mutual cultural influences between Africa and its trans-Atlantic diasporas in music, art, fashion/textiles, architecture, food and political identities from the eighteenth to the twenty-first century. Finally we will discuss how Africans and people of African descent remember the slave trade and the controversies surrounding slave routes/roots or heritage tourism in West Africa.

Learning Objectives:

1. In the duration of this course students will examine the concept of “Diaspora” and how it’s related to the violent dispersions of Africans.

2. Through detailed case studies, we will emphasize the biographies of enslaved Africans and their strategies of resistance and their transmission of cultures in the New World.
3. Students will be able to examine the economic, political and ideological factors that facilitated the slave trade and the emergence of the unequal global economy.
4. Students will have the opportunity to interpret primary sources, do close readings of texts and enhance their analytical and writing skills.
5. Students will learn about cultural exchanges in music, art, textiles and fashion between Africa and the Diaspora and how these shaped global Black identities till the present day.

Required Readings

Equiano, Olaudah. *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano: or, Gustavus Vassa, the African*. New York: The Modern Library, 2004.

Law Robin and Paul Lovejoy Ed. *The Biography of Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua: His Passage from Slavery to Freedom in Africa and America* (Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007)

Thornton, John. *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*. 2nd ed. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

French, Howard W. *Born in Blackness: Africa, Africans, and the Making of the Modern World, 1471 to the Second World War*. Liveright, 2021.

Hartman, Saidiya. *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007.

Konadu, Kwasi. *Transatlantic Africa*. New York: Diasporic Africa Press, 2018 (second edition).

Recommended Websites:

<https://www.slavevoyages.org>

<https://www.gettyimages.com/photos/brazil-slave?phrase=brazil%20slave&sort=mostpopular>

“Acervos Agudá: ‘The Brazilians’ of Benin” <http://acervoaguda.com.br/en>

Course Requirements and Expectations

- 1) Take-home midterm I : Slave ship mutinies. 25%.
- 2) Take-home midterm II: “High on the Hog.” 25%.
- 3) Participation in class and discussion sections: 25%
- 4) Final Exam: Take home: Compare and analyze the narratives, main themes and experiences of enslavement in Mahommah Gardo Baquaquah’s and Olaudah Equiano’s autobiographies. 25%

Grading Scale

The following grading scale will be used to convert numeric scores into letter grades and vice-versa. If an assignment is missing, the score for that specific work will be graded zero. Further information on grade and the grading system is available under the Academic Policies and Procedures section of the university's General Announcements.

Grade	Scores	Grade Points
A+	97.00 to 100.00	4.00
A	93.00 to 96.99	4.00
A-	90.00 to 92.99	3.67
B+	87.00 to 89.99	3.33
B	83.00 to 86.99	3.00
B-	80.00 to 82.99	2.67
C+	77.00 to 79.99	2.33
C	73.00 to 76.99	2.00
C-	70.00 to 72.99	1.67
D+	67.00 to 69.99	1.33
D	63.00 to 66.99	1.00
D-	60.00 to 62.99	0.67
F	0.00 to 59.99	0.00

Academic Honesty

Following the policy of this university, plagiarism (using other people's ideas or words without properly acknowledging) will not be tolerated. All references, including internet sources **MUST** be duly acknowledged. A first offense will result in a report submitted to the Dean of Students and a failing grade. The rules about what constitutes plagiarism may not be always clear. If you have any questions on how to properly cite sources, contact me. You may also find the following link useful. https://gpsdocs.rice.edu/orientation/Plagiarism_Hewitt_document.pdf

Introduction

The Atlantic Slave Trade and African societies

Week 1 (Jan. 10-14)

1/10 Introduction to course: Africa in Medieval Global History

1/12 Origins of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

1/14 The African Diaspora.

Reading:

James H. Sweet , “The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought” *The William and Mary Quarterly* Vol. 54, No. 1, Constructing Race (Jan., 1997), pp. 143-166

Howard French, *Born in Blackness: Africa, Africans, and the Making of the Modern World, 1471 to the Second World War* (Liveright, 2021), 28-47.

Joseph E. Harris, *The Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora* (Howard University Press, 1993), 3-9.

Discussion Sections:

Is the term “Diaspora” appropriate in discussing the violent dispersions of Africans across the world? What are the limitations if any, of the concept of diaspora? Do you think that the African Diaspora is unique?

Week 2 (Jan 17-21)

1/17 Slavery in African Societies
1/19 Captives and Commodities
1/21 “Slave Kingdoms”

Readings

Kwasi Konadu, *Transatlantic Africa* (Diasporic Africa Press, 2018), 1-10; 11-37; 38-56.

L. Lindsay, *Captives as Commodities*, “Introduction”

Movie: PBS: “Slave Kingdoms”

Discussion sections: What was the nature of slavery in African societies before the Atlantic slave trade? Did Africans “sell” other Africans? Who’s to blame? What commodities did Europeans exchange for captives? Do you think the slave trade was central to Atlantic Africa’s economy? Give a reason for your answer.

Enslavement and Resistance in Africa

Week 3 (Jan 24-28)

1/24 Strategies of resistance.
1/26 Strategies of Resistance II
1/28 Slave Ship Mutinies.

Reading:

Sylviane Diouf, *Fighting the Slave Trade: West African Strategies* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003), read Introduction, pp. ix-xxvii.

“Eleventh Letter: St. Croix, 12 March 1787. Journey from Guinea to West India. Conditions on a slave ship. Rebellion of the slaves,” in Paul Erdmann Isert, *Letters on West Africa and the Slave Trade: Paul Erdmann Isert’s Journey to Guinea and the Caribbean Islands in Columbia* (1788), Edited by Selena Axelrod Winsnes (Sub-Saharan Publishers, Accra, 2007), pp. 232-253.

Per Hernæs, 'A Sombre Affair': The Story of a Slave Ship Mutiny and the Destiny of the Mutineers Upon their Return to Africa," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, New Series, No. 10 (2006-2007), pp. 215-222

Discussion Section: What insights can historians obtain by emphasizing Africans' strategies of resistance against the Atlantic slave trade in Africa? What are the limitations if any in reconstructing the history of African revolts on a slave ship? How accurate can we visualize the untold suffering and experiences of Africans aboard slave ships from studying European sources?

Ethnic Identities and Cultural Exchange in the New World

Week 4 (Jan. 31-Feb 4)

1/31 African identity and slave (auto) biographies.

2/2 Ethnonyms and "trademark" identities

2/4 African captives and Cultural exchange

Reading:

Kwasi Konadu, "African Understandings of Self, Religion, and Returning Home" in *Transatlantic Africa*, pp. 59-86.

Kwasi Konadu, *Transatlantic Africa*, See Appendix, pp. 163-178.

Matt Childs. "Re-creating African Ethnic Identities in Cuba," in Jorge Canizares-Esguerra, Matt D. Childs, and James Sidbury, *The Black Urban Atlantic in the Age of the Slave Trade*. Penn, 2013: 85-100.

Discussion section: Did Africans and their descendants completely create new cultures, religious and ethnic identities in the New World? Did memory and creativity play any role in the making of African diasporic cultures? Or did the systematic oppression of enslaved Africans erase any memory of their African cultures?

Take-home midterm I due: Slave ship mutinies

Week 5 (Feb 7-11)

2/7 The Diaspora and Africa as a cultural continuum.

2/9 West Africa and Brazil.

2/11 Spring Recess, no class.

Reading

Roquinaldo Ferreira. *Cross-cultural exchange in the Atlantic world: Angola and Brazil during the era of the Slave Trade*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Read Chapter 5, "Religion and Culture."

Alberto da Costa e Silva, "Buying and Selling Korans in Nineteenth Century Rio de Janeiro," in *Rethinking the African Diaspora: The Making of a Black Atlantic World in the Bight of Benin and Brazil* edited by K. Mann and Edna G. Bay, 83-91. London: Cass, 2001.

Discussion section: In what ways does Ferreira and da Costa e Silva challenge ideas of European/Portuguese cultural hegemony in the Atlantic world? What alternative historical arguments do they provide? And what perspectives can such an approach provide in our understanding of cultural exchange and circulation in the Atlantic world during the slave trade?

Week 6 (Feb 14- 18)

2/14 Trans-Atlantic foodways

2/16 "High on the Hog"

2/18 "High on the hog."

Discussion questions: What are some of the connections between food ways in West Africa and the American South? How crucial is food in West African and African American culture and community? What can food as discussed in "High on the Hog" tell us about African and African American cultural resilience during and in the aftermath of the Atlantic slave trade and in contemporary times?

We will watch some episodes of Netflix documentary film "High on the Hog: How African American Cuisine Transformed America" in class.

African Revolutions in the New World: Haiti and Brazil

Week 7 (Feb 21-25)

2/21 The Haitian Revolution

2/23 Islam, "Jihad" and the Malê Revolt in Bahia

2/25 The Amina Rebellion

Readings:

James Sweet, "New Perspectives on Kongo in Revolutionary Haiti," *The Americas*, Volume 74, Number 1, January 2017, pp. 83-97.

John K. Thornton "I am the Subject of the King of Congo": African Political Ideology and the Haitian Revolution, *Journal of World History* , Vol. 4, No. 2 (Fall, 1993), pp. 181-214.

Reis, João José. *Slave Rebellion in Brazil: The Muslim Uprising of 1835 in Bahia*, Trans. by Arthur Brakel (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), pp. 73-93.

Ray A. Kea, "When I die, I shall return to my own land : an Amina slave rebellion in the Danish West Indies, 1733-1734," in *The Cloth of Many Colored Silks: Papers on History and Society*,

Ghanaian and Islamic in Honor of Ivor Wilks (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1996), pp. 159-195.

Discussion Section:

How did Africans and people of African descent in Haiti and Brazil mobilize their ethnic and religious identities for revolutionary action? In what ways did Thornton, Reis, Sweet and Kea depart from the tendency of earlier scholars to read African revolutions as offshoots of European ideological and liberal ideas? What insights can we obtain from such African-centered approaches?

Abolitionism and Black Diaspora Returnees in West Africa

Week 8 (Feb 28-March 4)

2/28 “The Love of Liberty Brought Us Here.”

3/2 African Abolitionism

3/4 Afro-Brazilian cultural legacies in Ghana.

Reading:

Kwasi Konadu, Transatlantic Africa, 107-135.

Hermann W. von Hesse and Larry W. Yarak, “A Tale of Two “Returnee” Communities in the Gold Coast and Ghana: Accra’s Tabon and Elmina’s Ex-Soldiers, 1830s to the Present.” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* Volume 51, No. 2 (2018).

Website: “Acervos Agudá: ‘The Brazilians’ of Benin” <http://acervoaguda.com.br/en>

Movie: “CNN Inside Africa: Afro Brazilians from Slaves to Returnees-July 2017”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ji3p9Q0Mufc>

Supplemental Reading: John Vlach, “The Brazilian House in Nigeria: The Emergence of a 20th-Century Vernacular House,” *The Journal of American Folklore*, 97, no.383 (Jan. - Mar., 1984): 3-23.

Discussion Section:

In what ways do Konadu challenge European-centered views about abolition and Black “returnee” movements? To what extent does material culture and family lore sustain “Brazilian” identities in West Africa? Why are these “Brazilian” identities and lineages important? Do you think it is disturbing for formerly enslaved Africans and their descendants to identify with the countries that held their ancestors captive? Give a reason for your answer.

Memories of the Slave Trade

Week 9 (March 7-11)

3/7 Suppressed memories of slavery

3/9 Contested “slave” monuments in Ghana.

3/11 African American identities and heritage tourism I

Readings :

Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007)

Brempong Osei-Tutu, “Contested Monuments: African Americans and the Commoditization of Ghana’s Slave Castles” in *African Re-Genesis: Confronting Social Issues in the Diaspora*: 9-19,

Ana Lucia Araujo, “Tourism and Heritage Sites of the Atlantic Slave Trade and Slavery” in *A Companion to Public History*, ed. David Dean (John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2018) , 277-288.

Website: “The Fight Over the 1619 Project Is Not About the Facts,” *The Atlantic*, December 23, 2019. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/12/historians-clash-1619-project/604093/>

Discussion Section: How did slave roots/routes tourism emerge? Who should benefit from the monetization of slave sites in the USA, Brazil and the Caribbean? Descendants of enslaved Blacks or the slave owners? Why do you think former slave holding castles and forts in Ghana and West Africa have become sites of contestations between Africans and African Americans? And what’s at stake in these war of words?

Week 10 (Mar 14-19) – spring break/No class

Week 12 (Mar. 28-Apr. 1)

3/28 African American identities and heritage tourism I

3/30 African America identities and Heritage tourism II

4/1 African American Identities and Heritage tourism III

Readings :

Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007)

Discussion questions: How does Hartman explore her own identity as an African American in relation to postcolonial Ghana and Africa? What do you make of the themes of estrangement and cultural alienation in *Lose Your Mother* ? What do you think of Hartman’s claim that Ghanaians were indifferent about the legacies of the Atlantic slave trade or the former slave holding forts and castles?

Watch Haile Gerima’s “Sankofa” on Netflix.

Artistic Connections, Solidarities and Trans-Atlantic Identities.

Week 13 (Apr. 4-8)

4/4 African Textiles in the Atlantic World

4/6 Kente and African America identities

4/8 Kente: From High Culture to popular culture

Readings:

Cécile Fromont, "Foreign Cloth, Local Habits: Clothing, Regalia, and the Art of Conversion in the Early Modern Kingdom of Kongo," *Anais do Museu Paulista São Paulo* N. Sér. v.25.n.2. (Mai.-Ago.2017):11-31.

Christopher Spring, *African Art in Detail*, 40-63.

Doran H. Ross, "A Beautiful Cloth does not Wear itself," in *Wrapped in Pride: Ghanaian Kente and African American Identity*, Doran H. Ross ed. (Los Angeles: Fowler Museum of African History, 1998).

Tanisha Ford, "Why Fashion Is Key to Understanding the World of Black Panther," <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2018/02/why-fashion-is-key-to-understanding-the-world-of-black-panther/553157/>

For a detailed photographic collection and textual analysis of Historic African textiles see Roy Sieber, *African Textiles and Decorative Arts* (The Museum of Modern Art: Distributed by New York Graphic Society, Greenwich, Conn.)

Discussion Section: In what ways did Atlantic commerce and Christianity influence regal textiles and regalia in Kongo? What were the uses of African textiles and how crucial were these items in commerce and ritual performances? How important is Kente in African American cultural and political expressions?

Take-home midterm II due April 8:

Week 14 (Apr. 11- 15)

4/11 African popular Music

4/13 BET, Hip Hop and Africa

4/15 Hip Hop in Brazil

Reading:

Paul Khalil Saucier, "Continental Drift: The Politics and Poetics of African Hip Hop" in *Sounds and the City: Popular Music, Place, and Globalization*, 196-208, eds, Brett Lashua, Karl Spracklen, Stephen Wagg, (Springer, 2014)

Marcyliena Morgan, “ ‘The world is Yours’: the Globalization of Hip-Hop Language” *Social Identities*, 22:2, (2013): 133-149.

“Beyoncé’s new film ‘Black Is King’ is stirring up controversy”

<https://www.theafricareport.com/34850/beyonces-new-film-black-is-king-is-stirring-up-controversy/>

Music video: “Beyoncé, Shatta Wale, Major Lazer – ALREADY (Official Video)”

<https://youtu.be/agCgvFTJeRs>

Discussion section: How crucial is hip hop as a vehicle of political expression in the Black Diaspora? In what ways would you consider hip hop as a product and driver of globalization? Do you think African collaborations with African American artistes will facilitate the mainstreaming of African music in the US? Give a reason for your answer.

Week 15 (April 18-22)

4/18 Revision

4/20 Revision

4/25 Exams/ Final paper due (Take home)